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A
SERMON
UPON
THE GENERAL FAST,

PREACHED IN
The Parish Church
OF
KIDDERMINSTER,
ON
Friday the 19th of April,
1793.

BY THE REV. G. BUTT, A. M.
CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO HIS MAJESTY; VICAR OF KIDDERMINSTER;
AND RECTOR OF STANFORD, IN WORCESTERSHIRE.

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SERMON

OF

THE GENERAL BAPTIST

PREACHED AT

THE BAPTIST CHURCH

ON

WEDNESDAY

OF

THE 19TH OF JUNE

1852

BY THE REV. G. B. BULL, A.M.

OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH, NEW-YORK, AND
OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH, NEW-YORK, AND

NEW-YORK

AT THE BAPTIST CHURCH, NEW-YORK, AND

OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH, NEW-YORK, AND

NEW-YORK

[The end of the world]

TO

I. H. BROWNE, ESQ. F. R. S.

AND REPRESENTATIVE IN PARLIAMENT OF THE
BOROUGH OF BRIDGNORTH.

SIR,

THE following discourse, which I take the liberty of inscribing to you, is not intended so much to prove, as to enforce, the principles which are avowed in it. The venerable principles of good order, repeatedly proved by ratiocination, and ratified by the experience of ages, are now instantaneously associated with their proofs, when presented to a mind unwarped by paradoxical vanity. Such a mind, God be praised, characterizes them to whom both here and else where I have the happiness to bear the pastoral relation. Suitably to the solemn occasion, upon which I delivered this sermon, and suitably to the situation of my country, now at war with a nation, who is most flagrantly at war with all other nations (at least with the principles upon which their welfare depends), I endeavoured so to cast and fashion my discourse, as might best advance the sentiments of patriotism and piety. These are equally proper respecting an enemy who is at once in arms against us as Christians, and as a people that are as indignantly unwilling to have recourse to the French school for its political maxims, as for its lessons of military

military prowess. Upon this matured conviction, the following discourse, as you will perceive, is constructed. In earnest myself, I earnestly addressed my beloved parishioners as Christians and fellow subjects, being zealous to impress them strongly with a sense of the duties demanded of them in the present crisis of their country; and, more especially, with a solemn conviction, that in aid of, and superior to all the strength of fleets, armies, and human council, the reformation of our national manners was the most probable means of securing to us that only assistance which implies victory and ensuing peace. This honest attempt (however imperfectly executed), as coming from a very old friend, you, sir, I am assured, will receive with your accustomed indulgence, and generous partiality to him: he, in the mean time, from his own personal observation, knowledge, and experience, must persevere in congratulating those, who are concerned in your private or public character, upon a connection and possession, from which they will derive all the benefits that are to be expected from the best principles—from a very sound and well-informed understanding—from the most munificent heart—and the most uniform tenor of unblemished manners.

I have the honour to be,

SIR,

*Your most obliged, and obedient
humble servant,*

GEORGE BUTT.

*KIDDERMINSTER,
April 29th, 1793.*

SERMON.

JOEL ii. 13.

Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

THE nature of man as a rational creature, and as a free-agent in a state of probation; his perils and his mortality, duly considered, would, it should seem, render the fear of his Almighty Creator, his strongest principle, and the law of God, the governing rule of his conduct. But when we also reflect on the Divine benevolence, testified in the dispensations of nature and grace, it is to be expected, that the sense of the Divine goodness, as well as power, would in such a degree combine the love with the fear of God, that men in general, who are enlightened by

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Christianity,

Christianity, would, in their conformity to his will, preclude occasion for such penitential solemnities as this which now claims our most serious observance. But if these remarks will apply, in a wide view, to many and mighty nations of men, what should *we* think and feel, who stand foremost amongst them on the permanent grounds, and with the actual possession of prosperity? Such grounds exist in the natural gifts and civil constitution of this country—in the temper and understanding of its people—in their acquired improvements and accomplishments—in their extensive commerce—in their spirit of adventure and fortitude—in their reputation and power—and in the mildness and purity of their established religion. In short, we are, and have long been a people so distinguished by all the means of national welfare, that I challenge all the factors of Innovation, and the peevish agents of Discontent, to point out any general evil amongst us; any general evil, I mean, of human institution, and under human control, which may not be traced up to the misconduct of individuals, in the different orders of men, rather than to the constitution of this country

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in Church and State. It is an admirable and admired proof of its profound wisdom and excellent spirit, that it is offensive and contrary only to those minds and those principles, which, in other respects, are the most disposed, and the most favourable to fastidiousness, discontent, and envy. We, therefore, I conclude, possess all the motives and means of national righteousness; and if we do not avail ourselves of them, we foster a disease which we are qualified to cure—and injure man by the same neglect, which is an impious expression of ingratitude to God.

Respecting those of our fellow-citizens who are discontented with their situation in this country, who unkindly, and not without self-conceit (at least, there is ground, in the *violent* dissent of a few against a great majority, to look for something of this kind), would spread their own discontentment amongst a large and happy majority of the natives; respecting these men, who either hate Christianity itself, with all the genuine malice and ferocity of Apostates, or only dislike the form of it established in these realms, or our civil constitution—re-

specting these men, I say, who thus stand apart from us in these prime and efficient requisites of a perfect society, we can only pray for their welfare and amendment as fellow-creatures: we must dread the tendency of their principles, if we wish the repose of mankind; and however we may pity their errors, and respect their persons, we must still consider them as armed with opinions which, from their wickedness or folly, may throw the world into confusion, by endangering the peace, invading the rights, and demolishing the social security of mankind. It asks but an ordinary sagacity to discern the probable fruit of such seed, and the conclusion will be ratified by the annals of human history. If the monster Anarchy, in these unprincipled times, has been fed into larger dimensions, into a firmer strength, and into a fiercer spirit, he must be opposed with augmented ardour and powers. We owe the exertion to ourselves, to our country, to all mankind, and to the generations to come. It is an exertion in the cause of justice; and this is the common concern of all individuals, nations, and ages. To you, and to the majority of my countrymen,

men, I may observe, that, when you were upon your trials (which of late have been many and alarming), you have not omitted to testify *publicly* your warmest sense of this truth, that we, as a nation, are blest beyond the lot of all others, in the means and possession of national prosperity. Therefore, my preceding statement of our felicity, as a people, is so widely admitted as true, that I am now at liberty to omit any farther proofs of it, and to deduce that inference from it, for which it was introduced, and which I conceive pertinent to the present solemnity.

Thus then it appears, that the majority of a great and enlightened nation, have acknowledged, in a manner the most open, demonstrative, and satisfactory, their felicity as a people, and have pledged themselves to their King and Country, as the ready defenders of them at the hazard of their lives. In defence of what, let me ask you? In defence of the unparalleled blessings which they and their fathers have derived from the great Fountain of all good. What then—shall we justly hazard our lives to preserve an invaluable gift, and all the while forget the donor? Shall we

glory in a benefaction, and insult the benefactor? Shall we, from all the selfish motives, guard the blessings of God, and not consult our generous affections, by practising such manners as are the best expressions of our gratitude to him? Is this rational consistency? Is this a decent—is this a right and safe conduct respecting Him who is life, and power, and perfection, and we but dust and ashes before him? But if we *have* thus turned from the Lord our God, from this ever-flowing and abundant spring of all our mercies; if we have thus rebelled against him more and more, in the proportion as he has increased his expressions of loving-kindness towards us—verily, it behoves us now to return to Him with all our *heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning*. Such an act is not merely the ingenuous penitence of one whose seditious conduct has insulted his lawful Sovereign; it is much more—it is much better—it is more necessary, and much wiser: for, in the present case, it is that important act which reconciles the rebel to that only King of Kings, who is almighty to punish the disobedient.

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When nations, the fluctuating beings of Time, and which, as nations, have no resurrection in a future state, ostentatiously (for national depravity glares in the broadest daylight) hurl their defiance at the throne of the Universal Sovereign by their manifest unrighteousness, it is to be expected that the awful majesty, and size of their punishment, will correspond to the conspicuous notoriety and enormous magnitude of the offence. The wrecks of mighty empires, long ages after their destruction, still disfigure the earth, and should admonish its inhabitants. And surely the present circumstances of the most irreligious people, ought to enforce the effect of this sublime admonition. But the avenging lightning of Heaven, which has fallen immediately, and is now falling upon this portion of the human race, reflects an awful menace upon all the neighbouring nations: this flash from Heaven itself is too near not to be seen by them; it is more or less felt by *all* of them. But, praised be God, there is at length ground for decreasing terror, and, of course, for increasing gratitude to Him. But now, a vast convulsion of the earth was to be dreaded;

but now, it was feared that selfishness and irreligion—all that is ravenous in rapacity—all that is insolent in vanity—all that is blundering in ignorance—all that is spiteful in envy—all that is bloody in vengeance—and all that is wicked in impiety, would be let loose upon the earth in all their worst forms, with all their worst attendants, and with all their most calamitous effects. Such were the apprehensions of those who had heads to think, or hearts to feel for their fellow-creatures. The miseries actually seen in a *wide* extent suggested, foreboded, and imaged the like in a still wider: these horrors on their wing, on their widest wing, and tending every where—every where roused men into caution—into fear—into terror—into the utmost spirit and expedition of resistance. But when perils so manifest, had not these effects on some, this their marvellous folly, or this their treacherous baseness, were observed by the honest part of mankind with silent horror and inexpressible indignation; and observed, I trust, for their own future instruction, as it has caused their present utmost exertion of all human means, to save themselves, and the coming ages, from calamities,
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of which, alas! we have lately been too well qualified to form some conception: it, however, would have been a very imperfect one, even if we had been nearer witnesses—even if we had been *present* spectators of the recent carnages, which have deformed another page in the history of mankind.

It was a new experiment to be made upon the earth, when man was to be exposed to all the latitude of conduct which an authorised neglect of religion, and a fashionable disbelief of God, must have occasioned; and when man, for the first time, was to be assigned a disciple to the selfish, proud, and envious, contentious and inhuman doctrine of all-levelling equality. I call it inhuman, were it for this reason only, that it obviously could not be reduced into practice, without occasioning such a deluge of bloodshed, as the conception of it must make humanity shudder, whilst the other forms of misery attendant upon it, would perhaps be still more calamitous. We conclude not now upon conjecture; the thorny and wounding shoots of the tree of liberty (falsely so called), have already testified what farther evils would arise, were they suffered to thicken,
increase

increase, and flourish under universal culture. One nation has evinced what would be the misery of others, were infidelity (the parent and nursing mother of these new-born, unphilosophical, and immoral policies) permitted to take her intended range, to push forwards her disordering and desolating march within the ancient pale of Christendom. It would be a revolution indeed either terminated by an enormous tyranny; or if terminating in the happiest condition of mankind imaginable, even such a consummation would be purchased at a price vastly beyond its worth in the calculation of a man, and much more of a Christian. And, after all, is Christianity itself in itself (for I mean it not as it has been modified, warped, disfigured, and abused by human selfishness and folly); is this excellent system of law, promise, and discovery, so trivial a possession to the human race, that we should lightly hazard the loss of it?

There is something in man which towers in desire and conception above this earth; he pants for immortal life, whilst he is surrounded, and stung as he is, with the surrounding images of death; he is conscious of thoughts
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which travel beyond the mighty universe, and wander into the immense eternity; he struggles indignantly with the evils of time; he has a better part which laments its union with the worse; he has a conception of his imprisonment in a small corner of a vast and well-inhabited universe; he has heard of, and without having heard of, he could have imagined somewhat of angelic intelligences, and he cannot but form some conception of the glorious Creator of all things; he springs in desire towards a nobler form of existence than this life presents. To man thus thinking, thus wishing, and thus aspiring, is unfolded the divine revelation of a Saviour, with a law and a promise, and a discovery adapted to train him into a conduct worthy of his exalted nature—to yield him sufficient motives for pursuing it, and to explain those mysteries respecting his future destination, which had hitherto afflicted the wisest of his fellow-creatures. Surely then in this one gift of God (the gift of redemption now revealed to us by his blessed Son), is included an excellency of rule, a strength of motive, and a power of price sufficient to arm us with our utmost and adequate abilities, to
endure

endure patiently, or resist bravely, whatever temporary evil, and to justify our hope of everlasting happiness. What then, as man, can we ask more of God? Say then, shall we blot out this instructive and animating light; shall we extinguish this salutary warmth; shall we refuse to accept this tendered grace; and shall we reject an incontrovertible rule of Divine authority, which prompts us to every noble and generous effort? Shall we, in short, reject a revelation which, raising man in hope and knowledge above and beyond this life, tends to subdue every selfish sentiment into the purest and most modest magnanimity; and, acquainting him with God, by the plain, solid, and indisputable report of God himself, leaves him in the utmost state of peace of which he is capable, and in the most perfect freedom, from the distracting tumults of doubt and speculation, to fill and crown the small space of his present existence, with the precious culture of every active virtue? I easily conceive *your* answer, my Christian brethren, to these questions. But, alas, if we consider the manners of the times, we behold men in *general*, estranging themselves from this tuition
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of God, and disregarding this the costliest donation of the Most High. The age is marked by the predominancy of irreligion and impiety; God is not in our thoughts, as he should be; the flesh predominates over the spirit; and our eternal interest is postponed for our temporal. Wealth, secular power, secular honours—all things stand higher in general estimation and pursuit, than virtue, and the salvation of our souls. All orders of men are warped from duty, by the glowing warmth of temporal prosperity. Besieged and undermined as all the nations of Europe now are (not indeed so much by armed men, as by the hideous systems of Atheistical policy), yet although these systems bode at once and advance misrule and universal misery, the individuals of each country are too negligent of the common good, nor are masters of that self-denial and superiority to personal profit and pleasure, which only can secure it. They have therefore drawn down the menace of the Divine judgment, and behold it blackening over their heads. But although, as Joel says in his animated manner, *the earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon are*

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darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining— they are still admonished in vain. Though (to change the prophetic language, and yet retain some vestiges of the sense) all ancient order and authority are made to quake to their very foundations ; though all the wide-spread wisdom of learned, experienced, and legislative antiquity, is seen to tremble beneath the irruption of untutored fancy, unparalleled vanity, and desolating profligacy ; though all the higher and venerable powers and principalities of men, ordained and instituted for the reward of heroic exertion, the protection of public decorum, the solemn administration of law, the majesty of extensive government, the civilization of the human race, and the most vigorous and rapid exertion of human activity, in awful emergencies ; though these higher luminaries, these suns and moons of well-ordered society are now menaced with darkness and eclipse ; though the stars also have begun to withdraw their shining, though these secondary lights of the civil firmament, insphered by Honour, preventing by their lustre universal darkness, and elevated in their brightness, as charges to generous emulation,

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are now threatened to be blotted out under the black cloud of spreading ignorance, irreligion, and anarchy—yet, alas! these terrific signs of universal calamity make not the due impression on the minds of men in general—so palsied are they by luxurious indulgence into criminal insensibility—so incapable are they, from habitual levity, from habitual selfishness, of the force and generosity of mind which constitute public spirit, and so callous are they grown, by customary impiety, to these tremendous intimations and menaces from Heaven itself. If men in general are thus sinful, and we thus conceive of them, the conception must impress us with horror—and so let it impress us. We meet not now to cheat ourselves into a false confidence, and to sooth a criminal droning into a downright sleep, into the sleep of death in sin. We have, in truth, a mighty business before us, respecting our country, our fellow-creatures, and our God; respecting time and eternity. Great, in sad truth, is the occasion that we should *awaken* in this perilous moment, that we should *be awakened* in order to *watch*, and perhaps to *act* beneath the raised standard of the insulted

Lord of Hosts. Respecting the rest of mankind, it is our duty to feel for them, and to pray for their conversion; it is still more, it is our duty to aid them by our own conversion and improved example. Would we serve our brethren, we must not wait for their co-operation—we must hasten to form the small number which shall save the city; we must take hint from the present solemnity, from the fast of the day, to cultivate into a habit that self-denial, that superiority of reason to passion, that supremacy of principle over sense, that virtue of philosophy, and that righteousness of Christianity which exalteth a man, and which exalteth a nation of men; in which at first is found the most ennobling form of victory, and afterwards the most transporting and lasting sense of joy. In short, we must now *rend our hearts, and not our garments, and turn unto the Lord our God*, from the motives of love as well as fear—assured from his works of nature and grace, that he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness, and ready to turn away the evil, when the menace of it alone has produced in us that reformation which is the

the end of all his severer dispensations to mankind: he would purify their manners, he would rectify their principles, and he would accomplish their eternal salvation; he would prove that he created but to bless, and that his glory, as the maker of all things, consists not so much in the display of his power, as of his goodness.

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